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ABSTRACT

This document reports the results of a cross-cultural study of adolescents' assessments of the quality of their relationships. Subjects were 13- to 15-year-old adolescents in Nanjing, China (N=53), a metropolitan area in the midwestern United States (N=53), and Harare, Zimbabwe. The adolescents in Zimbabwe were members of the Shona tribe (N=37). The Network of Relationships Inventory was used to assess nine relationship qualities: (1) reliability; (2) enhancement of worth; (3) affection; (4) instrumental help; (5) companionship; (6) intimacy; (7) conflict; (8) satisfaction; and (9) discipline. The subjects rated each of these qualities in their relationships with their mother, father, favorite relative, teacher, sibling, and best friend. Results indicated that adolescents in Zimbabwe perceived few differences between members of their social network. Chinese adolescents perceived their social networks in three subgroups: parents, nonparental adults, and peers. For American adolescents, major differences in the scoring patterns for the different relationships were found. Adolescents in Zimbabwe perceived their needs as met by all members of their social network more so than did Chinese or American adolescents; and held their teachers in higher esteem than did Chinese or American adolescents. American adolescents relied more on their parents and siblings than on other individuals to provide for their social needs; and rated relatives higher in affection and intimacy than did adolescents in China and Zimbabwe. Chinese adolescents' perception of intimacy in their social network was lower than that of adolescents in the United States and Zimbabwe. Data was presented in tabular form. (BC)

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Perceptions of Social Networks Among Adolescents from Three Cultures

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Abstract

Previous studies indicated that perceptions of social network members varied by the culture of the subject. The present cross-cultural study extended the research to comparisons of male and female 13 to 15 year old subjects' from USA, Africa, and China. The Network of Relationships Inventory was administered that assessed the relationship qualities of reliable alliance, enhancement of worth, affection, instrumental help, companionship, intimacy, conflict, satisfaction, and discipline. The target persons were mother, father, relative, teacher, sibling, and best friend. A significant overall effect for country differences was detected -- F (18, 258) = 16.71, $p<.0001$, as well as significant effects for target, F (45, 93) = 19.07, $p<.0001$, target by gender, F (45, 93) = 2.50, $p<.0001$ and target by country, F (90, 186) = 7.81, $p<.0001$, when contrasting the multi-ethnic Americans, Black Zimbabwean Africans, and Han Chinese subjects' perceptions of their network members. African adolescents perceived their social network members as differing very little from each other in the provision of their social needs. Chinese adolescents were moderate in their perceptions of their social network members. Adolescents from the USA focused on their immediate family for the gratification of their social needs. Gender differences were minimal. Findings were discussed in terms of the impact of culture on social development.

Introduction

It has been established that social networks function to meet the adjustment needs of developing persons and are perceived by them as an important source of support (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; DeRosier & Kupersmidt, 1991; Reid, Landesman, Treder & Jaccard, 1989). Tietjen (1989) advocates that social networks further function to promote competence within one's culture. Social requirements for a culture would influence how persons within one's social network would function. Indeed an empirical investigation has found this to be true. DeRosier and Kupersmidt (1991) in their investigation of children's perceptions of their social networks found differences between Costa Rican and American children that reflected social norm differences between Hispanic and U.S. cultures. Samples of subjects from three cultures, Africa, China, and USA, were selected for investigation.

From a review of social science literature and ethnographic reports the following expectations guided the investigation:

(1) African subjects' perceptions would be pervasive and diffuse as to the sources of their social support reflecting the competency required to function effectively in the extended family organizational pattern in their culture (Bourdillon, 1987; Nsamenang, 1992);

(2) Chinese subjects would exercise restraint in their regard for social network members as a reflection of emphasis on the Confucian ideal of harmony in their culture (Bond, 1986; Dernberger, DeWoskin, Goldstein, Murphey & Whyte, 1991); and

(3) USA subjects' responses would be consistent with previous findings of mothers and fathers as a major source of social provisions (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; 1992).

Subjects and Procedures

The following locations were sources of samples of subjects for the investigation: Harare, Zimbabwe (n = 37 - 17 males and 20 females -- all Black Africans from the Shona Tribe); Nanjing, China (n = 53 - 26 males and 27 females - all Han Chinese); and a midwestern metropolitan area in the USA (n = 53 - 30 males and 23 females consisting of 19 African Americans, 2 Hispanic, 11 Asian Americans, and 21 Anglos -- all from America). The subjects were adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15, living in an urban area with both parents and a sibling present in the home.

The instrument utilized was the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI) developed by Furman and Buhrmester (1985) to compare systematically the similarities and differences in relationships of the subject with each network member. Nine relationship qualities were measured: (a) reliable alliance, (b) enhancement of worth, (c) affection, (d) instrumental help, (e) companionship, (f) intimacy, (g) conflict, (h) satisfaction, and (i) discipline. The subjects rated each of the qualities for each of the following targets: mother, father, favorite relative, teacher, sibling, and best friend.

To establish cross-cultural validity of the NRI, a series of factor analysis procedures were completed. The responses of the African, Chinese and USA subjects to the questionnaires when mothers and fathers were the targets provided data for the factor analyses. Analyses and review of items indicated that underlying factors were fewer in number, but very similar to the factors described conceptually by Furman and Buhrmester (1985) in designing the instrument. The decision was made, based on personal consultation with Buhrmester (6/18/92), that the original factors could be used with the African and Chinese subjects.

Results

The nine factor scores derived from the NRI were subjected to multivariate repeated measures analysis of variance procedure (MANOVA) with gender (male vs. female) and country (Africa, China, and USA) treated as between groups factors and type of relationship (whether the target was the mother, father, relative, teacher, best friend, or sibling) conceptualized as the repeated measures factor. The analysis revealed a significant multivariate main effect for country, target, and the interaction of country and target. Multivariate effects of gender and its interaction with the other factors were also detected, but univariate tests of these factors failed to reveal significant effects. Subsequent analyses were conducted to partition the country x target interaction into contrasts of country at each target and assessments of the target effect across countries. The data are presented in Table 1.

Two sets of subsequent analyses were utilized to decompose the significant three-way interaction of gender, country, and type of relationship. The first partitioned the data by country and permitted the analysis of gender and type of relationship effects, and their potential interaction separately for subjects from Africa, China, and USA. The second partitioned the overall data set into segments for each of the six targets represented by the type of relationship factor and permitted the analysis of the gender and country effects, and their potential interaction separately for each of the six types of relationships. The means pertinent to these analyses are presented in Table 2. The focus of this investigation is on the significant target by country and target by country by gender interaction effects. Details concerning these effects are presented below:

Differences Within the African Sample. African adolescents perceived very few significant differences between members of their social network on the nine qualities.

- no significant differences between targets were detected with conflict and satisfaction
- only on enhancement of worth did relatives and teachers differ from the other network members
- teachers were lowest on reliable alliance
- relatives were lowest on enhancement of worth
- best friends were highest on intimacy and companionship and lowest on discipline
- scores ranged from high (3 & 4) to moderate (2 & 3) on a 5-point scale

Differences Within the Chinese Sample. The Chinese adolescents' perceptions of their social network members were generally grouped into three subsets of similar scoring patterns : parents (mothers and fathers), nonparental adults (relatives and teachers), and peers (siblings and best friends).

- nonparental adults scored the lowest of the groups
- peers scored the lowest on discipline and highest on enhancement of worth, companionship, intimacy, conflict, and satisfaction
- parents scored the highest on affection and nonparental adults scored the highest on discipline
- scores ranged from moderate (2 & 3) to low (1 & 2)

Differences Within the USA Sample. There were major differences in the scoring patterns for their network members among adolescents from USA.

- immediate family members (mothers, fathers, and siblings) scored the highest on reliable alliance, enhancement of worth, companionship, intimacy, conflict, and discipline
- nonparental adults scored highest on affection
- best friends scored highest on instrumental help and satisfaction
- fathers scored the highest in conflict, and mothers the highest on discipline
- scores were moderate (2 & 3)

Target by Gender by Country Differences. Overall target by gender by country differences were minimal.

- males in all three cultures perceived themselves as receiving lower levels of intimacy than females
- females in USA and China experienced more conflict with members of their network than did African females

Between Culture Contrasts. Significant differences were detected between cultural groups.

- African adolescents were more pervasive in their perceptions of their social network members
- Chinese subjects were more moderate in their appraisals
- USA youngsters perceived themselves as relying more on their immediate family for provisions of their social needs
- provisions of reliable alliance and affection by mothers and fathers were high (higher than 3.5) in all three cultures
- best friends played an important role in providing intimacy and companionship in all three cultures
- siblings were important as a source of a reliable alliance in all three cultures
- teachers' roles in the network varied by culture -- they were held in highest esteem among the African subjects and were viewed more of a source of conflict among adolescents from USA
- relatives were higher in affection and intimacy among adolescents from USA than the other two groups and were involved in their discipline
- Chinese adolescents' perception of received intimacy from their networks was significantly lower than that of the other two groups

Conclusions

The specific social competency expectations of the culture impacted adolescents' perceptions of their network members. Among African adolescents the ability to function within an extended family organizational pattern is the major social requirement for competence. In this family setting, the developing person learns to have their social needs met by a variety of persons. Consistent with these practices, the African subjects in this investigation, more so than the other two groups, perceived their needs as being met by all members of their social network.

Chinese adolescents reflect their culture's emphasis on conforming to the Confucian ideal of a harmony in relationships that is best maintained if there is distance in interpersonal interactions. To function competently in one's relationships one must exercise restraint in expressions of feelings. This ideal of social competence was reflected in the moderate to low range of intensity with which the Chinese adolescents perceived their network members. Chinese culture also emphasizes peer relationships which shaped the focus on peers (siblings and best friends) for satisfying social needs among these adolescents.

In USA the focus is on the immediate family satisfying one's social needs and youngsters in this culture did just that. Mothers, fathers, and siblings were perceived as providing majority of the needs of the USA subjects.

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Table 1

Summary of MANOVA and ANOVA Statistics for the Network of Relationships Inventory

Variate	Gender	Country	Gender x Country	Target	Target x Gender	Target x Country	Target x Gender x Country
Reliable Alliance	0.81	3.41*	1.41	29.34****	1.78	11.08****	0.59
Enhancement of Worth	2.56	17.00****	3.27	26.07****	0.80	22.24****	1.15
Affection	0.87	6.39**	1.26	20.06****	0.81	24.62****	0.55
Instrumental Help	0.19	6.44**	0.01	25.66****	1.58	8.85****	1.87
Companionship	1.16	13.06****	1.38	67.57****	3.15*	20.03****	1.06
Intimacy	0.37	17.05****	0.82	78.85****	1.99	24.83****	1.97*
Conflict	1.07	29.46****	0.14	9.54****	2.03	12.81****	2.51**
Satisfaction	0.11	3.82*	2.68	36.24****	0.62	10.77****	0.57
Discipline	4.29*	107.13****	1.61	42.87****	3.75**	16.21****	1.47
OVERALL	2.88**	16.71****	1.82*	19.07****	2.50****	7.81****	1.41*

NOTE: All contrasts involving the target factor are reported with probability levels adjusted in accordance with the Greenhouse-Geisser adjustments for degrees of freedom. Univariate degrees of freedom were (1,137) for the gender factor, (2,137) for the country factor and for its interaction with gender, and (5,133) for the target factor and for the interaction of target and gender, and (10,266) for the interaction of target and country, and the three-way interaction. Multivariate degrees of freedom were (9,129) for the gender factor, (18,258) for the country factor and its interaction with gender, and (45,93) for the target factor and for its interaction with gender, and (90,186) for the target by country factor as well as the three-way interaction of gender, country and target.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ **** $p < .0001$

Table 2

Means for the Network of Relationships Inventory for African, Chinese, and USA Subsamples

Variate	Mother	Father	Relative	Teacher	Best Friend	Sibling	Tukey HSD
Africa: Males, N=17							
Reliable Alliance	4.00	3.84	3.48	2.63	3.67	3.70	.66
Enhancement of Worth	4.22	4.08	3.59	3.86	4.28	3.76	.62
Affection	4.57	4.39	3.62	3.42	4.43	4.18	.62
Instructional Help	3.72	3.68	2.84	3.70	4.10	3.26	.64
Companionship	3.14	3.30	2.72	2.41	4.24	3.60	.65
Intimacy	2.76	2.59	1.94	1.98	4.29	3.17	.70
Conflict	2.61	2.51	2.20	2.27	2.18	2.20	.67
Satisfaction	4.39	4.37	3.60	3.36	4.18	4.18	.66
Discipline	3.04	3.20	2.26	3.31	2.16	2.55	.59
Africa: Females, N=20							
Reliable Alliance	3.76	3.76	3.20	2.62	3.19	3.77	.61
Enhancement of Worth	4.08	3.70	2.77	3.02	3.57	3.24	.58
Affection	4.62	4.45	3.38	3.09	4.27	3.93	.57
Instructional Help	4.12	3.32	2.72	3.62	3.68	3.70	.59
Companionship	3.62	2.72	2.25	2.32	4.27	3.55	.60
Intimacy	3.18	2.17	1.99	1.63	4.08	3.12	.65
Conflict	2.10	2.10	2.19	2.28	2.72	2.81	.61
Satisfaction	4.38	4.00	3.15	3.02	3.84	3.84	.61
Discipline	3.23	2.98	2.38	2.75	1.85	2.37	.55

Table 2, cont.

Variate	Mother	Father	Relative	Teacher	Best Friend	Sibling	Tukey HSD
China: Males, N = 26							
Reliable Alliance	3.95	4.01	3.39	2.99	3.71	3.99	.53
Enhancement of Worth	2.90	2.98	2.70	2.47	3.21	3.12	.50
Affection	3.79	3.92	3.19	2.74	3.63	3.76	.50
Instructional Help	3.27	3.45	2.39	3.02	3.22	3.43	.52
Companionship	2.60	2.64	1.91	1.95	3.29	3.42	.53
Intimacy	2.26	2.31	1.73	1.73	2.64	2.85	.57
Conflict	2.28	2.22	1.71	1.99	2.38	2.67	.54
Satisfaction	3.73	3.79	3.11	2.96	3.86	3.85	.53
Discipline	2.20	2.23	1.59	2.46	1.76	2.09	.48
China: Females, N = 27							
Reliable Alliance	4.23	4.26	3.32	3.62	3.90	4.26	.52
Enhancement of Worth	2.91	3.02	2.81	2.68	3.52	3.19	.50
Affection	4.09	4.15	3.07	3.12	3.93	3.83	.49
Instructional Help	3.38	3.33	2.04	3.11	3.35	3.31	.51
Companionship	3.06	2.73	1.80	1.96	3.65	3.46	.52
Intimacy	2.41	2.17	1.37	1.47	3.44	2.91	.56
Conflict	2.54	2.44	1.59	1.58	2.62	2.96	.53
Satisfaction	3.49	3.51	2.86	2.94	3.96	3.80	.52
Discipline	2.02	2.00	1.31	1.68	1.44	1.74	.47

Table 2, cont.

Variate	Mother	Father	Relative	Teacher	Best Friend	Sibling	Tukey HSD
USA: Males, N = 30							
Reliable Alliance	3.44	3.53	3.38	3.68	2.82	4.02	.50
Enhancement of Worth	2.28	2.57	2.27	3.64	3.35	3.95	.47
Affection	3.73	3.47	4.16	4.10	3.77	3.48	.46
Instructional Help	3.17	3.11	3.18	3.14	3.46	3.11	.48
Companionship	3.18	3.09	3.23	2.63	2.80	3.44	.49
Intimacy	3.60	2.69	3.12	2.31	3.21	2.10	.53
Conflict	2.6.	3.60	2.82	3.02	2.64	2.72	.50
Satisfaction	3.54	3.05	3.68	2.91	3.98	3.07	.50
Discipline	4.01	3.03	3.52	3.21	3.52	2.49	.45
USA: Females, N = 23							
Reliable Alliance	3.74	3.53	3.32	3.94	3.13	4.39	.57
Enhancement of Worth	2.28	2.69	2.32	3.35	3.10	3.85	.54
Affection	4.02	3.72	4.43	4.46	3.88	3.60	.53
Instructional Help	2.94	2.96	3.17	2.80	3.66	3.27	.55
Companionship	3.67	3.49	3.42	2.99	2.85	3.62	.56
Intimacy	3.95	2.99	3.25	2.59	3.34	2.31	.61
Conflict	2.83	3.67	3.05	3.28	2.72	2.80	.57
Satisfaction	3.80	3.22	4.01	3.09	4.33	3.68	.57
Discipline	4.44	3.20	3.33	3.27	3.02	2.46	.51